

A Girl of the Lumberlost.

[Continued from page 6, Col. 4.]
 bright blue gray eyes and its frame of curling reddish brown hair was the sweetest sight on earth, and at that instant Elnora was radiant.
 She set the hat on her head. It was just a wide tan straw with three exquisite peacock quills at one side. Margaret Sinton cried out. Wesley slapped his knee and sighed like a blast and Mrs. Comstock stood speechless for a second.
 "I wish you had asked the price before you put that on," she said impatiently. "We never can afford it."
 "It's not so much as you think," said Margaret. "Don't you see what I did? I had them take off the quills and I put on some of those Phoebe Simms gave me from her peacocks. The hat will only cost you a dollar and a half."
 She avoided Wesley's eyes and looked straight at Mrs. Comstock. Elnora removed the hat to examine it.
 "Why, they are those reddish tan quills of yours?" she cried. "Mother, look how beautifully they are set on! I think they are fine. I'd much rather have them than those from the store."
 "So would I," said Mrs. Comstock. "If Margaret wants to spare them, that will make you a beautiful hat, dirt cheap, too! You must go past Mrs. Simms and show her. She would be pleased to see them."
 Elnora sank into a chair because she couldn't stand any longer and contemplated her toe. "Landy, ain't I a queen?" she murmured. "What else have I got?"
 "Just a belt, some handkerchiefs and a pair of top shoes for rainy days and colder weather," said Margaret, handing over parcels.
 "About those high shoes, that was my idea," said Wesley. "Soon as it rains low shoes won't do, and by taking two pairs at once I could get them some cheaper. The low ones are two and the high ones two-fifty, together three seventy-five. Ain't that cheap?"
 "That's a real bargain," said Mrs. Comstock, "if they are good shoes, and they look it."
 "This," said Wesley, producing the last package, "is your Christmas present from your Aunt Maggie. I got mine, too, but it's at the house. I'll bring it up in the morning."
 He handed Margaret the umbrella, and she passed it over to Elnora, who opened it and sat laughing under its shelter. Then she kissed both of them. She got a pencil and a slip of paper and set down the prices they gave her of everything they had brought except the umbrella, added the sum and said laughingly: "Will you please wait till tomorrow for the money? I will have it then, sure."
 "Elnora," said Wesley Sinton, "wouldn't you?"
 "Elnora, hustle here a minute!" called Mrs. Comstock from the kitchen. "I need you!"
 "One second, mother," answered Elnora, throwing off the coat and hat and closing the umbrella as she ran. There were several errands to do in a hurry, and then supper. Elnora chattered incessantly, Wesley and Margaret talked all they could, while Mrs. Comstock said a word now and then, which was all she ever did. But Wesley Sinton was watching her, and time and again he saw a peculiar little twist around her mouth. He knew that for the first time in sixteen years she really was laughing over something. She had all she could do to preserve her usually sober face. Wesley knew what she was thinking.
 After supper the dress was finished, the plans for the next one discussed, and then the Sinton's went home. Elnora gathered her treasures.
 As she started for the stairs she stopped. "May I kiss you good night, mother?" she asked lightly.
 "Never mind any slobbering," said Mrs. Comstock. "I should think you'd lived with me long enough to know that I don't care for it."
 "Well, I'd love to show you in some way how happy I am and how I thank you."
 "I wonder what for?" said Mrs. Comstock. "Mag Sinton picked this stuff and brought it here, and you pay for it."
 "Yes, but you seemed willing for me to have it, and you said you would help me if I couldn't pay all," insisted Elnora.
 "Maybe I did," said Mrs. Comstock. "Maybe I did. I meant to get you some heavy dress skirts about Thanksgiving, and I still can get them. Go to bed and for mercy's sake don't begin mooning before a mirror and make a dance of yourself."
 CHAPTER VI.
 Wherein the Heart of Peta Corson is Touched by a Girl.
 MRS. COMSTOCK picked up several papers and blew out the kitchen light. She stood in the middle of the sitting room floor for a time and then went into her room and closed the door. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she thought for a few minutes and then suddenly buried her face in the pillow and again heaved with laughter.
 Down the road plodded Margaret and Wesley Sinton. Neither of them had words to utter their united thought.
 "Done!" hissed Wesley at last. "Done brown! Did you ever feel like a bloomin', confounded donkey? How did the woman do it?"
 "She didn't do it!" gulped Margaret through her tears. "She didn't do anything. She just trusted to Elnora's

great big soul to bring her out right, and really she was right, and so it had to bring her. She's a darling, Wesley. But she's got a time before her. Did you see Kate Comstock grab that money? Before six months she'll be out combing the Lumberlost for bugs and arrow points to help pay the tax. I know her."
 "Well, I don't!" exclaimed Sinton. "She's too many for me. But there is a laugh left in her yet. I didn't s'pose there was. Bet you a dollar if we could see her this minute she'd be chuckling over the way we got left."
 Both of them stopped in the road and looked back.
 "There's Elnora's light in her room," said Margaret. "The poor child will feel those clothes and pore over her books till morning, but she'll look decent to go to school, anyway. Nothing is too big a price to pay for that."
 "Yes, if Kate lets her wear them. Ten to one she makes her finish the week with that old stuff."
 "No, she won't," said Margaret. "She don't dare. Kate made some concessions all right, big ones for her—if she did get her way in the main. She bent some, and if Elnora proves that she can walk out barehanded in the morning and come back with that much money in her pocket, an armful of books and buy a turnout like that she proves that she is of some consideration, and Kate's smart enough. She'll think twice before she'll do that. Elnora won't wear a calico dress to high school again. You watch and see if she does. She may have got the best clothes she'll get for a time for the least money, but she won't know it until she tries to buy goods herself at the same rates. Wesley, what about those prices? Didn't they shrink considerably?"
 "You began it," said Wesley. "Those prices were all right. We didn't say what the goods cost us; we said what they would cost her. Surely she's mistaken about being able to pay all that. Can she pick up stuff of that value around the Lumberlost? Didn't the Bird Woman see her trouble and just give her the money?"
 "I don't think so," said Margaret. "Seems to me I've heard of her paying or offering to pay them that would take the money for bugs and butterflies, and I've known people who sold that banker Indian stuff. Once I heard that his pipe collection beat that of the government at the Philadelphia centennial. Those things have come to have a value."
 "Well, there's about a bushel of that kind of valuables piled up in the woodshed that belongs to Elnora. At least I picked them up because she said she wanted them. Maggie, how the nation did Kate Comstock do that?"
 "You will keep on harping, Wesley. I told you she didn't do it. Elnora did it! She walked in and took things right out of our hands. S'pose we'd got Elnora when she was a baby, and we'd heaped on her all the love we can't on our own, and we'd coddled, petted and shielded her, would she have made the woman that living alone, learning to think for herself and taking all the knocks Kate Comstock could give have made of her?"
 "You bet your life!" cried Wesley warmly. "Loving anybody don't hurt them. We wouldn't have done anything but love her. You can't hurt a child loving it. She'd have learned to work, be sensible, study, and grown into a woman with us, without suffering like a poor homeless dog."
 "But you don't get the point, Wesley. She would have grown into a fine woman with us; just seems as if Elnora was born to be fine, but as we would have raised her, would her heart ever have known the world as it does now? Where's the anguish, Wesley, that child can't comprehend? Seeing what she's seen of her mother hasn't hardened her. I guess we'd better keep out. Maybe Kate Comstock knows what she's doing. Sure as you live, Elnora has grown bigger on a knocks than she would on love."
 "I don't s'pose there ever was a very fine point to anything but I missed it," said Wesley. "because I am blunt, rough and have no book learning to speak of. Since you put it into words I see what you mean, but it's dinged hard on Elnora, just the same. And I don't keep out. I keep watching closer than ever. I got my slap in the face, but if I don't miss my guess, Kate Comstock learned her lesson, same as I did. She learned that I was in earnest, that I would haul her to court if she didn't loosen up a bit, and she'll loosen. You see if she don't."
 Up in the attic Elnora lighted two candles, set them on her little table, stacked the books and put away the precious clothes lovingly. Then she slipped into her little white nightdress, shook down her hair that it might become thoroughly dry, set a chair before the table and reverently opened one of the books. A stiff draft swept the attic, for it stretched the length of the cabin and had a window in each end. Elnora arose and, going to the east window, closed it. She stood for a minute looking at the stars, the sky and the dark outline of the straggling trees of the rapidly dismantling Lumberlost. In the region of her case a tiny point of light flashed and disappeared. Elnora straightened and wondered. Was it wise to leave her precious money there? The light flashed once more, wavered a few seconds and died out. The girl waited. She did not see it again, and so she went back to her books.
 In the Lumberlost the hulking figure of a man slouched down the trail.
 "The Bird Woman was at Freckles' room this evening," he muttered.
 "Wonder what for?"
 He left the trail, entered the inclosure still distinctly outlined and approached the case. The first point of light flashed from the tiny electric

lamp on his vest. He took a duplicate key from his pocket, felt for the padlock and opened it. The door swung wide. The light flashed the second time. Swiftly his glance swept the interior.
 "Bout a fourth of her moths gone. Elnora must have been with the Bird Woman and given them to her." Then he stood tense. His keen eyes discovered the roll of bills hastily thrust back in the bottom of the case. He snatched them up, shut off the light, relocked the case by touch and swiftly went down the trail. Every few seconds he paused and listened intently. Just as he reached the road the low hoot of a screech owl waveringly prolonged fell on his ears, and he stopped. An instant later a second figure approached him.
 "Is it you, Pete?" came the whispered question.
 "Yes," said the first man.
 "I was coming down to take a peep when I saw your flash," he said. "I heard the Bird Woman had been at the case today. Anything doing?"
 "Not a thing," said Pete. "She just took away about a fourth of the moths. Probably had the Comstock girl getting them for her. Heard they were together. Likely she'll get the rest tomorrow. Ain't picking getting bare these days?"
 "Well, I should say so," said the second man, turning back in disgust. "Coming home now?"
 "No; I am going down this way," answered Pete, for his eyes caught the gleam from the window of the Comstock cabin, and he had a desire to learn why Elnora's attic was lighted at that hour.
 [Continued next week.]
First Vaudeville War.
 Phoenician Drummer—What's going on tonight?
 Ancient Hebrew—You can have your pick. The Nineveh Family theater has got "Jonah and His Whale," and the Babylon Musical gamens are playing "Balaam and His Trained Ass."—Puck.
Would Be Pleased.
 Loquacious Visitor (who has been describing in great detail her bridal trousseau)—And you ought to see me in my going away frock!
 Hostess (wearily)—I—er—wish I could.—London Tatler.
Not Much.
 Patience—You say she was blind to all his entreaties?
 Patrice—Yes; until he gave her a solitaire.
 "Oh, then, she wasn't stone blind."
Advice.
 First Deaf Mute—What would you do in a case like that?
 Second Deaf Mute—I'd treat her with silent contempt; I wouldn't move a finger when I met her.
Before and After.
 "Before I was married life was one continual round of pleasure."
 "And isn't it now?"
 "No; it's one continual round of economy now."
A Man's Opinion.
 "Pa, what's a superman?"
 "One whose wife thinks he is better than his neighbors give him credit for being."

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